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to do (pre game)

- Effect of civil war in al-Watan?
- Get some stats for Ord fellow rune priest, Rana.
- Ord has to watch out for the law, since he's an exile. Potentially someone could turn the law on him.
- Treasure at Enfield House.

questions for players

- Ask the players to level up to 9 after this game

recap from last time

Two games ago, which was 2 months ago: The party destroys Aeris's indestructible space-time phylactery in Kairos, the plane without time. Back in Hollin, the young Hobnail Karn asks Kasskar to get his brother back from an admiralty press gang, who kidnapped him despite the desperate ruin caused by Firestorm. Searching at the admiralty forge, they're attacked by a disturbed and inexplicably psychic press gang.

Last game: The party finds Karn's brother held prisoner at the Enfield Trading House. They discover that their old friend Mikal had psychic control of the Admiralty and Enfield House, but that mental trauma from Firestorm broke his control and his victims' minds. The lich Ishild reveals that he is the god of the Caliphate's Al-Batin noble house - Ord's lords. Ishild urges Ord to reclaim the Caliphate for the rightful noble houses.

Treasure from Enfield House

I was thinking Kasskar could find some books here on a "modern" investing business technique that he could use to make interest over time. These are data about how prices change cyclically through the year in different commodities that are bought and sold on Hollin's docks.

Maybe more interesting, there are some books here summarizing information that the Enfield smugglers have used to blackmail different people and organizations in Hollin.

End of talk with Ishild

Last time Ishild told Ord, among other things that:

“The Caliphate is now engulfed in a full civil war between Krohn and the faux noble houses of the Ninety-Nine that Krohn himself put in power. I would argue strongly that your opportunity is to resurrect the real noble houses of the Ninety-Nine and rally them against Krohn. The real noble houses have powerful allies, now long forgotten, who can help.”

Kelly already told me by mail some of the things he'd like to ask Ishild. When Ord asks about other Ninety-Nine in hiding in Hollin, Ishild tells him that:

I know that a few of the Ninety-Nine are in Hollin. There's Ad-Darr, The Afflictor; Al-Mumit, The Destroyer; and al-Rahim, the Merciful, who you know as the mother hen Wren over at Werner's sanctuary. Obviously, the best information would come from Al-Alim, the All-Knowing, but I don't know where she is. So out of the Merciful, the Afflictor, and the Destroyer, I think The Merciful is probably your best bet.

“...he knows of any other Caliphate exiles like myself in Hollin or elsewhere....” Ishild is not aware of any other exiles, but on Caliphate *expatriates* in Hollin, he says:

“There are always Caliphate sailors working at the docks with their ships, but the Caliphate expatriates actually living in Hollin are mostly those at the Caliphate import-export houses, which trade between Hollin and al-Watan. Those houses have worked that route for many generations, and typically their members were born and raised in Hollin.”

“...anything he knows about Krohn's powers and possible weaknesses...” Ishild says:

This isn't exactly a weakness, but the Ninety-Nine brought servants into this plane, the Annur, who Krohn has tried to seduce into his service, but he hasn't been able to.

Does Ord have any other questions at this point?

Talk with Wren

Kelly had written:

Then I'll want to reach out to as many allies as I can find.

Wren reiterates again what Ishild said at the end of the last game, that Ord should seek out the rightful Caliphs, or more accurately their descendants, as allies.

Wren says that Krohn has a corp of assassins, known as Cold Comfort, who murdered most of the rightful Caliphs, but a few escaped into obscurity.

Now, given that Ord no information on where these people might be, that may sound like a tall order. But Wren says an organization near al-Watan has kept records as best it can tracking these escapees and their descendants over many generations -- and that organization is the aforementioned corp of assassins, Cold Comfort. Wren says that their refuge is on an island in the water where the rivers merge south of al-Watan.

Finding a ship

Kelly wrote:

“Somewhere along the way (probably during that last part) I'll want to find transportation, maybe through Burns after we snap him out of it. Finding the most up to date information on current events I can find is also a priority, maybe see if there's a merchant ship from the Caliphate docked in Hollin or something like that if I can't find up to date info somewhere else.”

Burns can't help much here, most of his resources were destroyed in Firestorm.

Until now, Ord really hasn't had the time or opportunity to connect with Hollin's Caliphate expatriates. But, with Ishild's comments, Kasskar's Street Smarts, and a little asking around, he has little trouble finding them.

One of the Caliphate import-export houses is called House Hanan. House Hanan was based in Braddock, and its people and assets were almost completely destroyed by Firestorm. One of their ships, the Venial, has recently arrived loaded with cargo. But, with Hanan's operations ended, they'll be returning to al-Watan without unloading. House Hanan's last survivor is named Sabbas, and he'll be going "home" to al-Watan for the first time on the Veniel's return trip.

Possibly the party could ride along by working something out with Sabbas or the Veniel's captain.

The Caliphate's history, politics

Ask Kelly if he would like describe the Caliphate's history and politics for the other players. Give him his mail from March if he would like to read from that.

Any place the players want to visit on the way to Al-Watan?

Possibly somewhere on Hilde or the city of Blackwells?

Do they meet any Pirates on the way? Possibly Hollin pirates and they could resolve the right between them?

al-Watan

Since Ord is from al-Watan, I will ask Kelly to kindly not act surprised by anything described here.

After a journey of let's say 6 weeks, the Venial arrives in the Bay of Nasir, the turbulent bay where the Jahara river reaches the ocean at al-Watan. The violence of the water is startling, and the party is surprised to see a few small fishing boats braving the waves. The Venial works its way between these fishermen and enters al-Watan's Najat harbor, which is set apart from the bay by a long stone sea wall.

When the party gets off the Veniel at al-Watan's dock, the hive of activity reminds them of Hollin's dock. There are sailors from all over here, and the party doesn't seem particularly out of place.

From the docks, you can already see two features of the city rising behind the dock warehouses. Nearby and rising grandly, there's a beautiful coliseum, three stories high. Further away, slightly obscured by the dusty haze, you can see a walled citadel complex built on the city's highest point. Ord knows that the citadel includes Krohn's palace.

If the party moves inland from the docks, they find that the city is sprawling and covered with an endless array of churches with domes and minarets, which would have been churches of the Ninety-Nine gods before Krohn's rise. Every building in the city is a light brown, from centuries of the desert dust settling into every crack and surface.

Although al-Watan and the Caliphate are rabid conquerors, there's no avoiding that al-Watan is a desert city with few natural resources, and commoners here are typically poor. As a commoner whose lord is the house "The Hidden", Ord is colorfully called "slave of the hidden." But Ord also knows that some recently conquered peoples become actual slaves, and you see many of them working around the city. Their lot varies depending on their work and owner, but is often miserable. And, some of these conquered folks become gladiators.

I said that here are sailors from all over here, and the party doesn't seem particularly out of place. But, Ord knows that away from the docks, the party's clothes will advertise them as foreigners.

Give the party a chance to get some clothes? Some typical clothes for men include a

long skirt wrapping the legs down to the ankles, a short jacket buttoning up the front, and a head wrap.

Rana, Doubt

The rune priests' monastery is on the long avenue going from the coliseum to the citadel.

Rana is a fellow Rune Priest from Ord's order. Ord knows that Rana has struggled for many years with two runes. The first is an ancient rune of power that Rana translates as "Doubt" or "Second guess." However, he doesn't know much of Doubt's purpose or history. The second is Destiny, which is a spell highlighting a route in front of you -- not the route that's the shortest, the best, or the most profitable to take in the future, but the route that, in the end, you actually are going to take. Despite struggling with these runes, Ord knows Rana to be a highly capable rune priest, and Rana would like to come along with the party.

The assassin's retreat

Assassin: shadow, poison, whisper. Heroes of shadow p 23 has a bunch of novel poisons, cobra, disguise, long game, psycho warfare, attack the psyche, assassinate an unborn through poison, greencake, moving like Crouching Tiger. Trained from childhood. Also kill soul. **Bullet time...except that the victim perceives their own relative slowness with horror...so, opposite of bullet time.**

It has elements of the San Marco convent, the high open ceiling of Sultan Hassan (if there's where Ord would like to fight the boss), the dojo-like rooms, contemplation areas.

I think maybe this should be on an island near the intersection of the rivers. It's secluded but in the middle of the city. The complex can also be large and have outdoor grounds, crouching tiger style, Bond villain complex style.

I guess it's a grassy, Alcatraz-like island with at least the San-Marco-like convent. How can the players get there without being detected?

Library

After working their way through the refuge to the library, the party is having a quiet moment.

- **Perception** for someone to see it -- party perceptions are 8, 8, 6, 10. So, let's say it's **DC 18 to notice it.**
- **Dex** to catch it -- party dexes are 4, 0, 7, 5. So, let's say it's **DC 13 to catch it.**
- **STR** to hang on: 7, 6, 5, 9. So, let's say **DC 17 to hang on.**

- If STR check is failed, another player can do a move while the player is struggling and do DEX 13 to help grab onto it.

If all this fails, the original target (probably Ord) is severely poisoned, choose a poison from the assassin chapter of Heroes of Shadow.

Garden

One into the garden a little way, the players are attacked by assassins.

- Assassins rush them over the water, crouching tiger style.
- Assassins rush them by running over the tree tops, crouching tiger style.
- The characters may run into **poison threads if they fail a DC 15 perception check.**
- They have bullet time attacks, which give them combat advantage and sneak attack similar to Kasskar's. In fact, I'm starting to think their stats should just be Kasskar's.

Swift Hand Strike, from the compendium

"The human assassin makes a melee basic attack, makes a dagger attack, and can shift 1, in any order." However, I'm going to add a second shift, and make the I'm going to replace "melee basic attack" with "sneak attack" and add a second shift.

Bullet Time...improved version of Swift Hand Strike

Same thing but (1) add a second shift that must be separated from the first by one of the attacks, and (2) convert the "melee" basic attack" to Kasskar's "sneak attack" if the assassin can get combat advantage, e.g. by flanking.

When this happens, the assassin is experiencing a kind of bullet time, whereas as the victim, the PC perceives the character suddenly moving like 4 times the normal speed while he can only watch ineptly.

Dome

When the characters re-enter the dome room, they see a figure sitting cross-legged on one of the caskets. Remaining sitting, he tells the players they have invaded Cold Comfort's refuge. He repeats this saying, "our *refuge*, man -- the fuck!" Regaining a little of his composure, he says: " My name is Raihim, meaning Showerer of Blessings. Of course for you, by blessings I mean the sweet release of death."

If the players try to move toward him, they'll get one move in, then Raihim will reverse the gravity

in the room, so that the bowl-like dome becomes the floor. Raihim and presumably the flying Ord can then duel on top of the floating caskets.

He casts *Interdimensional Air Strike* against the characters on the dome.

Exploit's Ord's flying, gives him the +3 on his sword that he's looking for.

post game summary

The party buys the Wayward from a Caliphate import-export house in Hollin, House Hanan. They recruit Burns as captain and sail to al-Watan to search for the rightful caliph's descendants. They infiltrate the island refuge of Cold Comfort, Krohn's corp of assassins. Leaving with records on the rightful Caliph's descendants, they are attacked for assassins and defeat them.

treasure given out

to do (post game)

- player questions to answer
- requests to send players after the game

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enemies cannot openly fight in a neutral place

djinns are like caliban

central mosques / schools, analogous to gothic cathedrals -- they're strategic hubs in al-watan, have qualitatively different functions

spell: interdimensional air strike

ancient lake

lost city -- is where angels are

frankensense

pern style air characters

40 days in desert

"empty garden"

djinn hell / lake of fire near anvil

gargoyles in al-watan

Possibly if Ord finds the legit descendants, they don't know they have powers or have to do something to regain them.

Right now I'm thinking:

- When the 99 came into Balaal near the well of life, they subjugated the djinn who ruled the desert. The most powerful djinn ruled the wells in the desert, which are everything. They imprisoned the most powerful djinn, who ruled at well of life, and imprisoned him in the Void Prison they created under the charred pyramid natural formation on the Sun's Anvil.
- The angels are made not just from light, but from moonlight, thus dual to the Djinn.
- Ishild sends Ord to the penal colony to find a member of the legitimate houses, who will have rightful power over djinn and/or angels. He will lead them to the Void Prison, which will also be guarded by Rancor-Monster-like creature.

Faction who want to take out Krohn / the caliphate:

- Conquered countries, and the slave fighters from them.
- The 99, particularly Ishild.

- The legitimate houses...use recoming of legitimate houses to bring people back from the Malik's side to the 99's side? Maybe someone from a legitimate house has been forced into slave fighting as part of the dispossession...this could be a great plot device...part of the mystery is Ord has to discover this, the person is not sophisticated, need to be kingmade into who he actually is. As actual descendant of the gods, what powers would the legitimate people have -- maybe command djinn and/or angels? Of course maybe they don't know they have them. I guess they'd be hunted by Krohn.
- The djinn and angels, Ord's own Djinn. What fire and light places can they go to sync with these? Maybe since the Djinn are fire, they go to the "sun's anvil", "the worst place god created" -- the sun's anvil is the Djinn's origin. What is there besides just black rocky waste? How about the natural charred pyramid with the nib at the top? They could meet the critical Djinn there.
- Who / what do they get out of the void prison? I'm thinking void is the opposite of light, maybe they get an archangel out of there.
- Who / what do they find at the well of life?
- What early, one-on-one challenge can Ord overcome to promote his sword up to +3?
- Do they have to go to the plane that the 99 came from?
- Friends who can shelter Ord as an exile -- remember that Ord would know people in the caliphate, he's not going back to a bunch of strangers.

Challenges:

- Get a ship and crew.
- Prevent exiles from taking his ship.
- Fight those who want to kill him as an exile...these can be someone interesting...Caliphate priests etc. who know him?
- Be able to summon his djinn at will.

How will Ord get a ship and crew? Also, how will he return as an exile.

I guess Ishild can tell Ord that there's a potentially powerful ally -- by name -- at such and such a place on Hilde. That place turns out to be the transportation camp / botany bay, and so they can meet some interesting characters there...people from conquered countries, who hate the caliphate, another exiled "blasphemer" like Ord, friends of the old order / enemies of Krohn (I guess this would be the natural ally for Ord there), slaves who rose up, maybe one or two random people not even from the caliphate, outright hardened criminals. This powerful friend can know where the Void Prison is, but he'll demand that Ord take some of his hardened friends along with him...this ally would have the inside information on how they beat Krohn. Of course, Ord has a ship and they don't. Should it be one of the 99 in the Void Prison or the archangel?

Maybe the ally should be the real, non-sham head of households for one of the houses...could be the non-sham head of Hidden House, although I guess part of Ord's

mission should be to specifically find the non-sham head of Hidden House...maybe that person doesn't know who it is, maybe it's Ord...or it's not Ord, because Ord has a larger destiny of leading all of the houses. They guy who wants to take Ord's ship is one of the new arrivals, a hard-core criminal.

If some of the allies are conquered nations, they could have their own gods / supernatural allies to bring in

I guess one way to play the countries conquered by the Caliphate is that they hate the Caliphate the way middle eastern countries hate each other...murderous hate. This would propagate down to the slave fighters...who are itching to attach the caliphate overlords as well.

The countries around the Caliphate are hardscrabble countries.

Caliphate at war, some action in resisting natins...deported people Ord meets could be rebels exiled from their own home
slavery in caliphate, gladiators -- Beowolf fights champion with exotic weapons?

"plantations" along "nile"
poppies are a crop? cotton and other water intensive crops along "nile"s

sunken temple like the one in Egypt

Ord's djinn is associated with the well of life?

Void Prison guarded by rancor monster?

slave fighters / gladiators, from different conquered countries

hunter seeker -- can that work in this campaign?

glassblowers

Other countries are trying to break up from the Caliphate, so Ord should go to one of those for help in attacking Krohn.

Ord is Good. He doesn't really worship the 99.

Where do the 99 come from? Perhaps Krohn's goal is actually to conquer that.

Remember that Ord was exiled, need to play on that when returning. Maybe now Ord is the "transported" character who is heinous in coming back. Maybe Ishild could explain this to him, that he's heinous. Any way that Ord can come overcome the stigma of being an exile? He was

exiled for having blasphemous views -- maybe he's interrogated whether they were correct or not. He could be approached by other exiles...these people could be real criminals.

He can seek out one of the other 99...which one?

We can do something where the angels don't have free will, thus Ord can get the talisman or whatever that gives them the ability to command them.

We don't really know any prophecies from the Caliphate.

So, djinns in islam denounced false gods and accepted monotheism; so maybe in our game the djinn with Ord still stays by polytheism while the others have gone over the malik. The wikipedia article also contrasts the djinn (made of fire) with the angels, made of light. So, the djinn and angel factions could come into play. Maybe they go to the angels for help and Ord has to convince them. Or, maybe the jinn/angels are forced to worship the Malek by subjugation and Ord could convince them otherwise.

Maybe in the final confrontation with Krohn, Krohn should try to tempt Ord with promises of earthly delights, etc.

So at this point just as background, the Caliphate would have bubbled over into full civil war as Kelly suggests, although it seems like that might be relegated to background given that the stuff will happen in Hollin.

Interestingly, Kelly writes I'm thinking Ord's true name is Talib Abd al-Batin. -- al-Batin, the hidden, and I also used "The hidden" for Ishild. So, unless we want to mark it as inconsistent and sideline it, Ord would be from the family descended from Ishild, but also helped kill Ishild once.

Krohn and his "cousin" are the same character, so by killing Krohn, Ord would end the civil war.

Additional folks could come from the Caliphate specifically seeking Ord, since he was publicly exiled.

Djinn are fire, angels are light; maybe Ord should get some talisman corresponding to each to signal he leads them. Maybe the angels ask Ord to get one of their guys out of the void prison, since there's no light there.

They could begin by seeking some special Caliphate weapon to use against Krohn. Maybe Ishild could be the 99 who approaches Ord. If Ishild figures out what they did to the phylactery, he might be up for destroying the plan without time.

I guess I do know so much about Cairo and Egypt that we could do something actually in the Caliphate.

Ishild

If and when Ord returns to his room next to Kasskar's room at the Mooncalf and spends the night there, he'll wake to find Ishild sitting next to the bed having some opium.

Ishild says, "You know, I like what you've done with my place, Ord. Or should I say, Talib Abd al-Batin. It's a lot cheerier in here than it was with the shrouds."

He has a long laundry list of stuff to discuss with Ord:

- He is the 99 called "The Hidden," or al-Batin. In name, that makes Ord a slave of Ishild's house -- Ishild is embarrassed that this fact escaped him until recently. So, how ironic is it that Ord killed Ishild before either of them knew that they were related. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!"
- He didn't know that Aeris was going to burn the city and raise the dead. He did not give Aeris the information about Firestorm and Yawning Graves.
- He did not participate in the fight between Aeris and the evil Gradskan kings and the good Gradskan kings. Now that Aeris has killed the Angel of Death, completely finishing the Gradskans, Krohn is free to come hunting the 99.
- The party found a way to destroy the phylacteries. He'd like to close the gate to Kaitos to prevent that from happening again.
- Ord has a sword for slaying immortals, which obviously Ishild frowns on.
- Then can discuss how Ord already defeated Krohn once.
- Ishild can tell Ord that the guilty god was the angel of death.
- Ishild can tell Ord that the caliphate has broken out into full scale civil war. Killing Krohn would turn this fight to the House's side to win.
- He could tell Ord that the 99 keep the world in existence so they must survive.
- He can tell Ord that he's scared of what could happen if Krohn finds the god in a jar.
- I guess we know now that like High Hill, the 99 entered al-Watan because it was a portal or power source. Presumably it would be a portal from the 99's plane -- which was what?
- Krohn has now cornered the market on greencake, from which he'll make the Sorcerer's Stone and become immortal.
- Maybe the Djinn is like Steve's animal spirit, a protector of the Caliphate.
- He can summarize how Ord has become powerful: he has the sword of immortal slaying, he has the Djinn spirit, he has already beaten Krohn once.

What do they have to do?

Just killing Krohn is a little too vanilla -- maybe because there are different instances of Krohn, it's futile to kill just one -- maybe they have to find a mechanism to kill them all. Actually I guess killing Krohn is not technically the issue -- it's saving the 99. Maybe the first step is they have to destroy the greencake, or prevent Krohn from accumulating what he needs. Kill all instances of Krohn, including the "cousin". The Djinn has to do something significant.

Does Ord have family in the Caliphate or Al-Watan? If so, they'd be affected by the civil war, maybe even taken hostage by the Krohn. How else is Ord affected by the civil war? Maybe his hometown or friends are under attack? Maybe his particular house ("the hidden") are under especial attack.

the real heads of the houses were replaced long ago by the Malik's stooges, so maybe we should reveal a character who's the legitimate head of al-Watan. Maybe it's Ord? Maybe that's what the Djinn signifies. So, maybe Ord should be looking at taking back the borough in al-Watan of the Hidden. Maybe he needs to rally the forces of his house because he can't defeat Krohn alone -- the forces of his house can be the heirs of the legitimate house, not the Malik-stooge house. So, he has to find some legitimate Aragorn type character there who know these people.

Try to work in the fact again that Ord is a rune priest.

Reading from Kelly's writeup, the head of the hidden clan would have been replaced by the malik using a "deals, bribes, and assassinations,"...so potentially that's an interesting character, the assassinated one.

Possibly at this point the Caliphs could still be deadlocked trying to choose the new Malak...obviously if Ord defeats Krohn this could end up being Ord, which would be a good but over-the-top end to Ord's story. Can Ord explicitly lobby and sway the vote for himself.

Fighting in the al-Watan might be a good opportunity for house-to-house fighting in the game.

Possibly learn how to make the animal spirit appear at will. Possibly learn to harness some wider range of spirits, or learn something other power /artifact related to the religion...the thing is we haven't covered much of the lore of the caliphate as far as exploring al-watan, so there are lots of opportunities there.